

**Massachusetts Coalition for Women's Wage Equality
Lowell Public Hearing
March 6, 2007 5:30-7:00 PM
UMass Lowell Alumni Hall
Minutes**

Attendees: Aaron, Ana, Ava Boistress, Sarah Briggs, Ricky Cash, Neary Chadbourne, Andre Chataney, Melissa Coffin, Tiffany Cook, Jennifer Cooper, Catie Coyne, Susan D'Amore, Vanessa De Jesus, Nick Eng, Liz Fragole, Monica Galisky, Kathy Galucci, Thomas Genatossio, Pat Gorton, Nicole Gracetta, Stacie Hargis, Patricia Ho, Veronica Holmes, Alice Hubbell, Mikhael Jobran, Margie Kennedy, Marion Kilson, Deanna Lamport, Vanny Lao, Elizabeth Markson, Anne Mulvey, Soady Ouch, Lois Pulliam, Marta Vega, Susan Winning

Commissioners: Lianne Cook, Marianne Fleckner

MCSW Staff: Jill Ashton, Lucinda Kallis-Hilbert, Intern

Welcome

Commissioner Fleckner welcomed the group and thanked everyone for attending. She introduced fellow Commissioner Cook and offered background on the MCSW and its legislative responsibilities. Commissioner Fleckner spoke about the current state of pay equity in Massachusetts and offered statistics about the wage gap from the MCSW's *State of Women* report, noting how pay inequities affect women's ability to access education, housing, investments, child care, and retirement. In response to the pay inequities women face, Commissioner Fleckner announced that the Commission, the YWCA, and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), along with many other dedicated organizations, have come together to establish the Massachusetts Coalition for Women's Wage Equality to promote and advocate for women's wage equity. Additionally, two pieces of legislation, Senator Chandler's *An Act to Authorize the Human Resources Division to Undertake a Study of the State's Job Classification System*, and Representative Jehlen's *An Act to Further Defining Comparable Work*, have been filed to respond to the pay inequities women face in the Commonwealth. Commissioner Fleckner gave a brief synopsis of this legislation.

Liz Fragole of the AAUW greeted the attendees and expressed gratitude to several people who helped to facilitate and organize the hearing, including Kathy Kobos of the YWCA of Lowell, Linda Brantley and Jill Ashton. Ms. Fragole spoke briefly about the work of the AAUW and introduced local area members and officers. She went on to express the advocacy efforts the AAUW has been involved with, including advocating for improved access to education for minority women, promoting careers and education in the fields of mathematics and sciences, and stressing the importance of education as a gateway to women's financial freedom as well as finding a practical remedy to get women aware and involved with achieving their wage equality.

Testimony

Soady Ouch was the first woman to testify. She introduced herself as a resident of Lowell and a mother. She currently works a full-time job that pays \$7.00 per hour and she expressed difficulty making ends meet, paying for food, car payments and insurance, and household expenses. She testified that child care was not an issue for her because her children's father took care of them after school and on the weekends in lieu of paying child support. She expressed difficulty in accessing public assistance and noted that each time she applied, she was not eligible despite her very low income. Ms. Ouch identified lack of maternity leave as a problem for low income and minority women and stated that when she gave birth to her two children she was forced to take two weeks unpaid leave from her job. She testified that this experience has led her to feel a

considerable amount of guilt and blame. She blames herself for not being a good mother and not being available for her children when they needed her.

Neary Chadbourne introduced as a resident of Lowell. She apologized for not speaking English well, because of which, she works in a large factory operating a machine. She testified that she has many problems in the workplace and that her boss often raises his voice to her. She said that she did not understand why the union takes \$36 out of her paycheck each month. After having difficulty expressing herself, Ms. Chadbourne submitted written testimony to Commissioner Fleckner.

Catie Coyne introduced herself as a student at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell and the child of a single mother. Growing up, Ms. Coyne said her mother's employment status greatly affected her family and self-esteem. She stated her mother earns approximately \$30,000 per year and cannot access child support from her children's father. As a result, the family struggled with buying food and clothes and paying rent.

Stacie Hargis stated that she could not identify herself as a victim of wage discrimination because women and men do not openly share or talk about their wages and earnings. She spoke about her experience as a daughter of a widow. Once her father passed away, her mother faced difficulties paying for Ms. Hargis's education on a single income. Ms. Hargis noted that children of women who face wage discrimination are in danger of not getting the educational opportunities they deserve.

The next woman who testified identified herself as a University of Massachusetts-Lowell student and a sociology major. She expressed that she is currently searching for employment in the human services field and is having difficulty finding a job that pays well. She noted that human services positions are a "catch-22," because the positions are geared toward women and traditional women's work roles, but they also perpetuate pay inequities because they are underpaid and underappreciated.

Commissioner Fleckner invited the attendees to comment on any observations, personal stories, or thoughts about pay equity.

Pat Gordon testified that she knew of a woman who was in a position and left to earn more money at another job. After she left, her position was filled by a man who earned \$30,000 more per year for the exact position and responsibilities. She noted that this scenario is not unusual and that women's work is undervalued and under-appreciated.

Commissioner Fleckner agreed that the positions and fields dominated by women, such as social workers, teachers, secretaries and clerical workers, are extremely underpaid and undervalued, especially when compared to positions that are of comparable worth but dominated by men.

Ms. Ouch expressed to the male attendees that no one was talking behind their backs, and that with men involved, the pay equity situation can only get better.

Monica Galisky testified about her experience as a women's studies student. She cited that research has stated that women are better workers than men and bring unique qualities to a job that a man cannot. She noted that the public should be made aware of this evidence.

Liz Fragole responded to Ms. Galisky's testimony by reflecting on the public's perception of women employees. She noted that women are often paid less than men because employers often see

women as temporary employees who may not stay in a position long-term because of childbearing, motherhood, and taking care of family members.

Kathy Galucci stated she had two points to testify about. First, she noted that she works in a business setting and that in her workplace and experience, women do not ask for what they are worth and they do not value themselves. She also noted that women do not want to “ruffle the feathers” of their employers and ask for a salary of which they are worthy. Her second point was the issue of elderly relatives and housing. She expressed concern for women who have little financial stability and their inability to access housing as they age and reach their senior years.

Commissioner Fleckner agreed and Liz Fragole stated that women need to talk about their salaries to other women and ask for what they deserve.

Marion Kilson noted that women at all levels of society are affected by wage discrimination and pay inequities, including a minimum wage worker and a female lawyer. She stated that her generation made a mistake and sent a message that women have to choose between their career and their children.

Lois Pulliam noted that pay equity is an issue for both men and women, and men have a responsibility to advocate for their wives and daughters and also educate them on how to negotiate for their worth.

Liz Fragole agreed that it is important for women to learn negotiation skills and to use men as a resource for learning them. She noted that men need to teach their mothers, wives, and daughters to negotiate for better pay, pensions, and health insurance.

Commissioner Fleckner noted that negotiating and networking is important for women to reach full wage equality.

Andre Chantaney testified about “the other gender’s perspective.” He agreed with the previous testifiers that men have important roles in assisting women on how to negotiate with their employers. He also noted that successful women should also be mentors and resources for other women.

Patricia Ho from the YWCA of Malden and Girls Inc. seconded Mr. Chantaney’s comments and said women must work with younger women and girls to make mentoring relationships happen. She noted that mentors are needed from the mathematics and science fields to show young girls that they have several options and horizons for employment opportunities.

Commissioner Fleckner reminded the attendees of the current pay equity legislation and highlighted the success legislation has had in Minnesota and other states that have successfully closed their wage gaps for public employees. She also noted that once the public sector achieves pay equity, it can serve as a powerful example for the private sector.

Commissioner Cook referenced the MCSW website and encouraged people to contact their legislators. She noted that “everyone has a powerful voice.”

Commissioner Fleckner agreed with Commissioner Cook and announced Equal Pay Day and also recommended former Lt. Governor Evelyn Murphy’s book *Getting Even* for further information.

The entire panel of Commissioners and the AAUW members thanked the audience for their participation and attendance.

Adjourn

The hearing was adjourned after a brief clip of the movie *9 to 5*.